



Zero Waste

Zero Waste: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Rethink Waste

MassDEP Municipal Waste **Reduction Toolkit**



Recycling has become a national habit, a ritual practiced by over 100 million people every day. Yet recycling alone will not end our dependency on landfills and incinerators, nor reverse the rapid depletion of our natural resources. As world population and consumption continue to rise, it is clear that our one-way system of extracting virgin resources to make packaging and products that will later be buried or burned is not sustainable.

What Can You Do to Promote Zero Waste?

Becoming a "Zero Waste" community may seem like a daunting task, but the idea isn't to become 100% waste free, but rather for our waste stream to come "darn close" to being nothing more than the irreducible minimum by promoting practices at home, work and school that fully embrace the concepts of recycling, composting and waste reduction. Start small and move your way up the zero waste food chain.

Adopt a Zero Waste Resolution in your Community

The *Zero Waste Toolkit for Municipal Officials* will provide you the necessary tools to work with your community leaders to promote zero waste. It may seem like a long shot, but you'll never know unless you ask.

Sponsor a Zero Waste Event

Zero Waste Events help ordinary people see how simple it is to implement the practices of zero waste (composting, recycling everything and most importantly thinking about waste before it is created or purchased).

Zero Waste Events can be held in any area by any group with ease and can be replicated by other organizations that would like to hold similar events. This module will present several models of zero waste events you can hold in your community.

What is Zero Waste?

Zero Waste is a new way of looking at our waste stream.

Instead of seeing used materials as garbage in need of disposal, discards are seen as valuable resources. A pile of "trash" represents jobs, financial opportunity, and raw material for new products.

Zero Waste is a 'whole system' approach to resource management that maximizes recycling, minimizes waste, reduces consumption and ensures that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace.

Other countries around the world and some U.S. communities have begun to evaluate and redesign their current systems to encourage recycling and to create a more materials-efficient economy. American companies who do business overseas are already redesigning their products and manufacturing



processes to meet the Zero Waste standards adopted by other countries. If they can do it there, we can do it here.

Why is Zero Waste Important?

The system of consumption and wasting that drives our demand for raw materials creates an unsustainable demand on natural resources as well as costly environmental threats on the disposal end.

Waste Impacts Climate Change

Scientists around the world have concluded that modern levels of materials and energy consumption are having a destabilizing influence on the world's atmosphere and are major contributing factors to the climate change we are now experiencing.

Energy consumption contributes directly to climate change by adding carbon dioxide from burning petroleum products, trap radiant heat and keep it from escaping from the Earth's atmosphere. The resulting warming of the air is changing our global climate.

Materials consumption contributes indirectly to climate change because it requires energy to mine, extract, harvest, process, and transport raw materials, and more energy to manufacture, transport and, after use, dispose of products.

Of all the materials used in products, only 1 percent is used in products 'durable' enough to still be in use six months later, according to industrial ecologist Robert Ayres. This wasteful consumption of materials wreaks havoc on our land and water resources. What's seldom appreciated is that it also wreaks havoc on our atmosphere and contributes to climate change. Waste prevention and recycling are critical to stopping climate change.

A growing international movement toward the concept of Zero Waste calls for resource efficiency and eliminating rather than managing waste – strategies that have major benefits for slowing climate change. There are zero emission cars and zero accident worksites; Zero Waste is a goal for how we should responsibly manage materials and the energy required to make them.

